

Theme: Success
“What is Your MVP?”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – based on a sermon series by Adam Hamilton
November 9-10, 2013 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

17 Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. 18 Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. 19 By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.

VIDEO What is your MVP?

SLIDE What is your MVP?

There is a question that I want you to wrestle with today. What is your MVP? I'm not asking who is your MVP because most of you would say Peyton Manning or some other player that you think is the most valuable, that we're not talking about a person. And MVP is about principles and ideas that give you clarity and help you experience success in life. During this series of sermons we have been looking at and talking about the secrets of success and we began by redefining what success looks like. Every week during this series we have been rethinking the world's definition of success versus the definition of success we find in the Scriptures. We are challenging you and inviting you to experience the kind of success the Bible talks about in your own life. Today we are going to talk about this idea of an MVP and what that might look like in our lives.

As we remind ourselves of these truths today I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. At the very top you will find listed the Scripture passages that we are going to look at today and then there is a space for you to write something down that you would like to remember from today's message. I hope there are a few things that you hear today that you want to write down and remember and reflect upon later. The things we will talk about today are things that those of you in the business world might be very familiar with. These principles are constantly applied in

business settings but sometimes we don't think to apply them to our personal lives or to what it means to be a church. To encourage you to take notes as we talk about how this idea of MVP might apply to our personal lives and to each of us as the body of Christ.

Continued on that side and on the backside you will find daily Scripture readings which tie back into today's message. I believe if you'll take the time to read the Bible on your own this week that it will speak to you and encourage your heart as you grow in your understanding of what true greatness and success looks like in life.

When I first began serving as a pastor I was told that each year I was supposed to go to a continuing education event so that I could continue to grow as a pastor. My very first continuing education event was a seminar by George Barna and the focus of it was leadership in the church. I had worked with Bank of America and Pacific gas and electric Company in Northern California doing internships while in college and we often went to seminars about leadership and growth in the business world, but this was the first time I've seen these principles applied to the church and my own personal life as a pastor.

I was first introduced to this idea of an MVP in the business world and the more I thought about it the more I realized that it applied not only to the church or to the military or to sports but it also applies to our own personal lives. And MVP is a clear mission and vision and plan.

SLIDE **Mission**
Vision
Plan

If you have a clear mission or sense of purpose and understand that purpose, why you exist, and you have a vision or picture of what that looks like when it is actually lived out with goals and objectives, and then you develop a plan to actually fulfill those visions you will find that you accomplish more in your life. You will find a greater sense of joy and satisfaction and hopefully you get to the end of your life and you discover that you are all used up for this great purpose and you will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

SLIDE **Mission = Why?**

Let's begin with this idea of a mission or a purpose. When you are looking at a mission statement you typically are asking the question, "Why?" A mission of

an organization tells why it exists. What is its purpose and here at First United Methodist Church our mission or our purpose statement is to what? I say this to you every week it's printed on top of the bulletin and that it's over the doorway as you leave the church out of the atrium.

SLIDE Our purpose is to be Jesus Christ to the world.

That drives everything that we do and it is our defining statement. When we set our budget and determine how we spend the finances that you contribute to this place it ties back into this idea of being the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. It is why 20% of our budget goes towards missions and service and caring for others in the world. While we as a church try to be clear about our mission and great corporations try to do this as well, I want to ask you a question.

SLIDE Are you clear about your mission?

If I were to sit down with you and ask you, "Tell me your mission in life," could you tell me what that is? Do you know what your purpose is? I'm fascinated as I read atheist philosophers who try to answer this question. Most of them say there is no inherent meaning or purpose in life but instead you make that up as you go along. You come up with your own meaning or purpose and that is one way to approach it.

But if you're someone who believes in God and you believe that God is ultimately the creator of all things, the question we are meant to ask is what God's intention was in creating human beings. What is God's purpose for us? If we can answer that question that we will find our driving purpose and mission. So let's look at some of the Scriptures which tell us why God created us because of we begin to own these things then we can find ourselves discovering our own purpose and mission in life.

Let's start with the idea that God is a God of love. The Scripture says that God is love and that God very nature and essence is love. This is why I tell you every week and I try to encourage you to imprint this phrase upon your heart that you were made by God to be loved by God. God also is created in nature and God takes great joy in creating human beings. He created human beings because he had a desire to give away his love and when we read the Scriptures about creation and the creation story we see this idea that God created human beings to be recipients of his love.

The Scripture say that God created animals first and they certainly basking God's love, especially my Golden Retriever. But God wanted something that

would reciprocate his love in a conscious way. So one of our main purposes is to be recipients of God's love and then to reciprocate that love. This is not that hard to understand because most of your parents, when they decided to have you as their child, did so not because they thought they needed someone to do chores for them. They probably didn't decide to have you because they wanted a tax write off. They decided to have a child because something inside of them wanted to create and there was a yearning or a longing to give love away. This is one of the impulses that drives us towards procreating.

I realize that some of us are accidents, but even if you were, your parents quickly figured out that they love you deeply. I also recognize that some of you never experienced that love from your parents and I know how deeply that when a person, when they haven't experienced love from a parent. The reason that wounds us is because there is something inside of us that needs that kind of love which is another way that we know that we were made by God to be loved and to be cherished.

I have told you this story before, but from the time my wife and I were married we had this feeling inside they were called to adopt children. There was something inside of us which belonged to give love away to children which already existed in the world and needed a home. It was a long and difficult process for us and it was painful and there were times we want to give up, but we knew this was something that God wanted us to do and so we continued moving forward even through obstacles and painful moments. Eight years ago we were driving through the night in November in Ukraine through sleet storm to meet a little boy and little girl who were each in different orphanages. I had this clear sense that these children we were about to meet belonged to God but they were going to be entrusted to us. There was something inside of us that longs to give love away to the children and we hoped and prayed they might return that love to us.

The little girl who would become our daughter was four at the time and little boy was nine. We met them and immediately our hearts went out to them and I would love to tell you that everything was great after that but the truth is it still a lot of work and the only way to get through it is to remember the purpose which is that we longed to partner with God and give love and hopefully receive that love in return. I remember the first time I held my daughter in my arms and she was squirming and not sure what to do with me but I had a deep sense of love that overwhelmed me and I loved her more than anyone else except for maybe

my wife Tami. Of course I loved them in different ways, but there was something about this child and this love that you feel for her. As I held her in my arms I didn't realize that you could love a human being is much.

Several weeks later we were driving away from the orphanage for the first time with our children and we had Thomas squished between myself and my wife and I had Vika on my lap because it was a small car. As we weaved in and out of traffic my daughter began to giggle and then she promptly threw up in my hands. I wasn't even grossed out by it. I just caught it and then threw it out the window and in some ways this is a metaphor for how God loves us. God created us and invest in us and loves us and his love is so deep and wide that he is willing to catch whatever we spit out and take care of. He loves us more than we can possibly imagine or believe and is willing to do anything for us to know this.

The Scripture uses two primary metaphors to understand the kind of love that God has for us. One image is that of God as a lover and we are the beloved. God is the groom and we are the bride. The Scripture also says that God is the parent and we are his children. God tells us in the Scriptures that when we are born that he loves us and held you in his arms. In the book of Hosea you have as powerful image where God says he tenderly loves us as a parent loves a child.

It's not like God created us because he had a deficit and he was needy and codependent. And it is best if when we have children we don't do so because we are emotionally needy and dependent and we need our kids to tell us how much they love us. But when you love someone selflessly and sacrificially it is appropriate and right that the rhythm would reciprocate and that love would be returned. I can remember when my daughter was first beginning to speak and comprehend language and she would talk about how she loved us this much, and she would spread her arms as far apart as she could. But that didn't come for several years because she first needed to trust us and to know that we would be there for her. We worked hard those first few years to create that space for both of our children and there is something about that, when the kids would reciprocate that love eventually, and it just melted me.

I can remember driving home from work and the children would be waiting in the front door with her face pressed against our glass door the front of our house. They would scream, "Papa's home, Papa' home!" They would give me bear hugs and we would tickle wars and it was magic.

Part of what we do when we gather for worship as we reciprocate God's

love. We remember God's love but we also return that love as we sing songs and lift our hearts to God.

But something happens when our children turn about 12 years old. I remember first time our son didn't want to walk next to us anymore but instead he wanted to walk 5 feet in front. There is this pulling away that begins to happen and I know it can be very painful for parents. I see many of you go through this and I've experienced it myself. We start to recognize that most of the times when our kids tell us they love us as they get older is because they want something and not just tell us they love us. We pulled closer to our parents for a moment until we get what we want and then we push them away again. I have been told that when our kids get 19 or 20 they begin to come back again and so I can't wait for that day.

I went through that journey with my own parents and many of you did as well. Many of you have lived that journey with your children and many of you are in the middle of it. That journey is one that many of us have experienced in our spiritual lives. It didn't happen when you were 12 but typically it happens for us when we are 18 or 19 or 20 and we step away from the church and go off to college or in the workplace. We are a bit embarrassed to admit that we actually believe in God and we begin to push God away. We don't think we need God and God is seen as a restriction on our freedom. We don't want to be around God and we may God walk 30 yards behind us as we walk ahead. After a while we stop talking to God and we no longer worship or express praise or love to God.

Until suddenly we find ourselves in need of something and we come back to God and we say, "O Father, please help me. Daddy, please give me this thing that I need." We get very religious for a moment and then when the need is past we walk away from God again.

Finally, somewhere along the way we wake up. We realize that we may have missed something very important in life. At some many of you ended up here at First United Methodist Church. More than half of you have walked away from church or hadn't been to church since you were a child before you started coming to this church. Only about 5% of the American population over the age of 40 has had no religious exposure when they were kids. About 20% of the American population under the age of 40 has had no experience or exposure to religion. Most of us in American culture walk away from God at some point because we are not sure we really need God. We can kind of do it on our own and our culture even teaches that radical independence.

This is why I try to remind you every week of your main purpose, because most of us have forgotten.

SLIDE The first purpose in your life is to let God love you.

The first purpose in your life is to let God love you and then to reciprocate that love. Jesus had the greatest commandment is to love God with your heart, soul, mind and strength. This is what you were made for and if we don't realize this and understand it then we miss out on the most important part of life. Just like those persons who struggled in life because they didn't feel that love from their earthly parents, so it is that we struggle when we don't receive that love from our earthly parent. Indeed, the number one way that I have seen people find healing from not feeling loved from their earthly parents is by remembering that they have a heavenly parent who does love them more than they can imagine or believe.

When we do discover this purpose and live into it this truth changes everything. Augustine put it this way, "**In His will there is peace.**"

SLIDE The second purpose in your life is to be a good steward of God's creation.

The second broad big idea in Scripture about your purpose is that God created the first humans not just to love and to be loved but also to take care of this planet. God said, "This is my creation but I give it to you to take care of." That has to do with both caring for the creation as a whole but specifically caring for other human beings. We were created to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God, according to the prophet Micah.

We were created to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, which is why Jesus gave this as an equally important commandment to loving God. Jesus said we were created to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Jesus said we are to speak up for those who can't speak up for themselves. We were created to seek justice like a flowing river and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. James tells us this about true religion in James 1:27.

SLIDE *27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.*

In 1 John 3:16-17 we hear these words about the truth of what it means to love God and to be good stewards.

SLIDE 16 We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?

This is exactly what Jesus says when he describes the last judgment and says, "Did you care for the hungry and sick and the thirsty and naked and the stranger and the prisoner? For when you did it for the least of these you did it for me."

You and I were created to care for creation and God's creatures, our brothers and sisters. The Scripture captures this big idea with one phrase.

SLIDE Good Works

We are meant to wake up every day of our lives and remember that we were made by God to be loved by God and to return that love to God and to God's creation. We are meant to respond to that love by doing good works to all that you can, as often as you can, everywhere that you can and in any way that you can. This is what John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, taught as part of the central core of the Christian faith.

We find this captured in Ephesians 2:10 when Paul writes these words.

SLIDE 10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good works he planned for us long ago.

I love this passage and it's one that each of us should try to memorize because we are God's masterpiece.

SLIDE We are God’s POIEMA

POIEMA is the Greek word and do you recognize one of our English word that comes from this word? We are God's poem. We are God's poetry. We are God's works of art. God created us but God created us to do good works. That is our purpose in life and God does that so it might be our way of life and a regular rhythm of how we live every day. Every day we are meant to wake up and say, "Here I am Lord. I love you Lord. I want to follow you and honor you. I trust in your love for me." Then you go out the door and onto your mission which is to look for the people who are in need of a blessing. We are meant to do good works in this world.

We are meant to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. This is our

mission. This is our purpose. We might summarize it in this way that you see in the screen. Let's say these words together.

SLIDE Our purpose is to be loved by, and to love God; to love and serve others; care for God's creation and be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

If you could remember that it will shape what we do with our lives. It is meant to shape everything else in our lives. It is the foundation upon which the rest of our lives are built. Our personal life, our values, our ideals are one cylinder. Our family relationships with our parents, siblings, spouses or our children are meant to be affected by this purpose. This purpose is meant to shape how we see others in the world, even those in other parts of the world who are in need—our neighbors and even our enemies. It is meant to shape how we approach our work or school. Finally, it should affect how we spend our finances and how we use the resources given to us.

All of these things are shaped by our understanding of our purpose. It funnels its way into every part of our life. But the truth is that many of us are not clear about our purpose and as Carlisle said, "When somebody is not clear about their purpose they are like a ship without a rudder."

The wind can blow you any which way but you never really get where you're going because you don't know where you're going. You don't even know why you are when you don't know your purpose and so look and feel like you're floating in an abyss, into nothingness.

I want to suggest to you that across the course of your life this is your great purpose for which you are made. You were made to love and be loved by God, to love and to serve others, to care for God's creation and to be the presence of Christ in the world.

SLIDE George Bernard Shaw purpose quote (graphic)

"This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

He goes on to say, "I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice

in life for its own sake. Life is no 'brief candle' to me. It is sort of a splendid torch which I have a hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it over to future generations."

There are many times where we end up like that clod and find ourselves complaining that the whole world will not devote itself to us. But when we flip it and recognizes not about me but it's about fulfilling and living into a greater purpose than myself, being all used up for that purpose, you find joy in life and meaning in your life. This is why I hope you will claim this is your purpose.

SLIDE Our purpose is to be loved by, and to love God; to love and serve others; care for God's creation and be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Let's turn for a minute and talk about vision.

**SLIDE Mission = Why do you exist?
Vision = Where are you going?**

Vision is the preferred picture of the future. If the idea if that I'm living out my purpose or my mission then it will look like this particular picture. We sometimes talk about this as goals and objectives as we look at what life will look like down the road if we are living our purpose. We talk all the time in this church about visions and pictures of things we hope to do together as we seek to be Jesus Christ to the world. Every Christmas we paint a picture for you of something we could do together that we could never do on our own. Over the past three years you have together builds four wells for different communities in Africa.

SLIDE Well (picture)

Together we have helped to build the girls dormitory at the Spring Valley Slum area outside of Nairobi.

SLIDE Talitha Koum (picture)

Our local project last year was that the Holly House where we renovated the dayabilitation center for residents.

SLIDE Holly House (picture)

In two weeks we will announce this next year's Christmas vision in this picture of what we hope God is calling us to do.

SLIDE Guatemala (picture)

You heard last about a medical and dental clinic and community center in Guatemala which became a reality because of one of your Christmas offerings.

We have had visions of connecting with young people who are called to be pastors so we can have good solid leaders for the church and the next generation and so this year we have an internship program. We had a vision for connecting with college students up at Fort Lewis college and we now have Rooted serving more than 100 college students. Every Thursday night they gather for food that you provide in worship and connection.

SLIDE Rooted 1 (picture)

SLIDE Rooted 2 (picture)

We have a vision for developing new campuses throughout this region where we are helping people to become Jesus Christ to the world. We have land in Grandview that we one day hope to be able to build upon but we know that God is calling us to be more than what we are now in that picture is what we will continue to develop and next year together and it won't be something any one person can do but something we must do together. As a group we can do this. The world can be different when we do these things together.

SLIDE Martin Luther King – I have a dream (graphic)

Dr. Martin Luther King was on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial when he painted one of the most powerful visions our nation has ever seen. You remember that, when he said, "I have a dream." Millions of people bought into that dream because it was a lofty dream which tied in to the purpose that people maybe had never even articulated. Somehow inside they felt the desire to give dignity to other human beings and they were to pursue justice. As a nation we were changed by the power of a dream which was a vision painted that little boys and girls of all races would hold hands and go to school together. That is the power that visions and dreams have to change the world.

The Scriptures talk about vision as *chazon* which is God inspired. It is meant to be a vision that is worthy to give your life to. In the book of Proverbs 29:18 we find this exact word used.

SLIDE *Where there is no vision, the people perish (KJV)*

When we don't know what our purposes and we have no vision we find ourselves with little direction out wandering around in the world. Many of us today live without a clear sense of purpose and as a result we often have no

vision or picture of a preferred future. We don't know why we're here and we run out of dreams.

Not all visions are big and huge. Some of them are small, like when you go to the doctor and you find out you have high blood pressure. That happened to me recently and I began to have a vision of having lower blood pressure. I believe my body is a gift from God and I would like to make sure it was useful for as long as possible. I would like to be all used up by God but not sooner than I need to be. I want to grow old with my wife and see my children and grandchildren if possible.

I remember watching my grandparents dance at their 50th anniversary and having a vision of being able to that with Tami someday. That's a vision that I have for my marriage.

I have lots of visions. Do you have any visions for your life? Do have any concrete and specific goals, a picture of the future that you are going to work towards? Without a vision we perish and we wander aimlessly. We can't accomplish what we might accomplish.

I remember going to a workshop once on vision and he talked about doing a SWOT analysis. This is something that many of you do in the business world or you may have done in your past, but I think he can be helpful when it comes to looking at vision in our personal lives as well.

SLIDE **Strengths**
Weaknesses
Opportunities
Threats

You begin by looking at your strengths and what you are really good at. If you're going to have a vision about something that you want to be doing with your life you might begin by asking about what you are good at and what brings you joy. What are the weaknesses that you might need to strengthen? What are the opportunities or unmet needs before you and what are the threats? Out of that you can begin to formulate a vision in terms what you want to spend your resources on. Businesses do this as they are developing their strategic plan and it's a good tool to use in our personal lives as well.

There is another way to look at finding a vision from a theological perspective, using the Scriptures and prayer.

SLIDE Discovering vision where purpose, prayer, passion and gifts meet unmet needs.

People come to me all the time in this church with visions of places where they see need in the community. As the church has grown over the years there have been more and more people who have needed care during times of crisis. As several people prayed about this we began have a vision of a caring ministry and our associate pastor Roger Haney has done a great job of painting a picture where we can become a caring congregation that is being Jesus Christ to the members of this church but also to the community. More than 20 of you have been trained as Stephen Ministers over the past two years and even more of you have been trained to visit people in the hospitals and go to the nursing homes and walk with people through grief. We now have more than 100 volunteers involved in Congregational care and all of that began with our purpose of being Jesus Christ the world and then added that with some prayer and several people who had passion and many of you who have gifts and you met and unmet need.

I have seen this play out over and over again in this congregation as many of you follow your passion and put them together with gifts and prayer as you seek to be Jesus Christ the world and you meet a need. Let me ask each of you again. Do you have any visions in your life?

SLIDE A vision without a plan is wishful thinking.

That leads us to talk about a plan because the vision without a plan is wishful thinking. Many times we find ourselves stalled at this point in the process. We might have a purpose and a dream or a vision but we never put together any plans to achieve them.

So when I was told by the doctor that my blood pressure was a bit high and I was told that the best way to deal with that is more exercise and better eating and less stress. Diet, exercise and reducing stress all sound like good things until you have to figure out how to plan those in your life. I know these things but do I really care enough to do something about them. I care enough about wanting to grow old with my wife and be there for my children and be your pastor for a while longer that I had to sit down and do something about it. I realized that I need to plan to eat better, exercise more and get more downtime.

If I want to have a vision of a long and happy marriage then I need to plan times in our calendar where we go out on a date. The hardest part about achieving a vision in many ways is putting down the plan and sticking to it.

But here's the thing about plans. Plans change. Life happens and sometimes the visions and dreams that we have are never going to happen. Judge Danelle Taha is the Dean of the Pepperdine law school. She wrote, *"The mantra, 'life happens,' almost always jettisons the best of plans. If one has some great, grand plan for one's life I can only imagine how disappointing much of what happened might be."*

If you put all of your eggs in one basket in terms of your plans for life and then your hopes and your dreams are dashed, what do you do next? When that happens, the key thing to remember is that the plan is not the main thing. The main thing is the purpose or the mission underneath it all. When your visions or plans are thwarted you then lean back on your purpose. When life throws you a curve ball it's time to ask how you live out your purpose given the circumstances that have been putting your way.

Sometimes you will find that God is an expert at taking your broken dreams and using those as a springboard even more amazing things God wants to do in your life. Dr. Hal Hansen wrote a book about his son Jeff. Hal and his wife Julie brought a little boy into the world 20 years ago and named him Jeff. They had all kinds of hopes and dreams for their son just like any parent would have. Maybe you would be a quarterback on a professional football team. Maybe he would be another Warren Buffett. Maybe he would be a doctor following in his old man's footsteps.

But by the time he was six years old it was clear there was something not quite right with Jeff. He wasn't able to do the same things that other kids could do. They went to the doctor and he was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis. Neurofibromatosis is a genetic condition that affects the skin and muscles and bone. It slows down development of the body in certain areas. Sometimes, in rare cases it can produce tumors on the optic nerve that will leave the person blind.

In the opening of his book Hal describes what it felt like when he got that diagnosis. He said, "All the hopes and all the dreams I had for my son I felt like were taken away in that one moment." They still held out hope that Jeff could get better but every year for the next six years one more of those dreams to be taken away. Finally at age 12 they took Jeff to the doctor and he was declared legally blind because of an optic tumor that developed. He said, "At that point I felt numb. I felt like everything had been taken away from me."

But just didn't think that. He's 12 years old and he had a bit more hope than

his dad. That summer Jeff went into a furniture store any sadness really comfortable recliner that was pretty expensive. He had a vision that he would be sitting in that recliner in his home and so he told his father. Hal said, "Jeff, that's just not in our budget to buy that recliner for you."

Jeff said, "How about if I raise the money myself?"

Hal thought it would be good for his son have something to work on so we told him, "If you raise the money, you can have it."

Jeff started to bake sale every day in the front yard during that summer. He called his little shop out in his front yard, "Jeff Bistro." He and his mom would bake furiously all day muffins and cookies and bread. He also discovered that he could paint some things and so he painted little greeting cards. He would have them for sale at the bistro.

The owner of the furniture store got wind of the fact that Jeff was saving up money for this recliner and he learned that Jeff was legally blind so one day he showed up with his truck and delivered the recliner to Jeff's house and said, "You don't have to pay for this. It's my gift to you. I heard your story and I just wanted to bless you."

Hal noted in his book that generosity he gets generosity and this change just vision. That recliner cost \$1300 and his vision was now bigger than just getting that recliner and instead becomes, "I want to help other kids who have optic tumors, just like this man helped me."

So Jeff kept running the bakery that summer and they expanded the bakery. The local news media ran a story about Jeff and then he had people lined up around the block into his front yard to buy baked goods from Jeff's bistro. By the end of the summer Jeff had raised \$15,000 to give away to the children's tumor foundation. A 12-year-old young man who was blind begins to have a vision and he could see something bigger than himself. He can see how he can help other kids.

People were buying is no cards and noticed that he really had a gift for painting and they encouraged him in that so his parents began to buy him small canvases the paint on. People began to want to buy his paintings and pretty soon his parents bought him larger canvases and he would sell his pictures and whatever money he made he would give away two things they cared about.

In the midst of this the Make-A-Wish foundation chose Jeff to be recipient

of a wish. They asked what he would like to do and Jeff said that he really wanted to meet Elton John. This is a 14-year-old kid who wants to meet Elton John and so they made that happen. He got to go backstage to Elton John concert and he got to meet Elton John and Elton John found out a bit about Jeff's story. Elton got ready to go out on stage and Jeff said, "I have something for you before you go." He pulled out of his pocket a check for \$1000. He said, "I would like to give this to your orphanages in Africa that you started."

Elton John opened the check and he was stopped in his footsteps. He had come backstage to bless Jeff who was a young boy who was blind and he was stunned that this young man would give him a check for thousand dollars to help other kids in Africa. What kind of kid does that? He stopped the beginning of his concert and sat down with Jeff to find out more about him. He then found out about his paintings and then he commissioned just to paint paintings for his orphanages. Then he commissioned Jeff to paint paintings for his house and then introduce Jeff to some of his friends like Billy Joel and others who began buying his paintings. Pretty soon Warren Buffett was buying Jeff paintings and had just come and used him as an illustration at his annual shareholders meeting of Berkshire.

Jeff paintings began to be sold across the country and now you have to have at least \$10,000 to buy one of them. People began to recognize that he was a child prodigy when it comes to painting. Would you like to see one of his paintings?

SLIDE Jeff Hanson Painting (graphic)

This is the kind of work that he does. We also have a picture of Jeff himself painting.

SLIDE Jeff Hanson

I think we also have a picture of him with Elton John.

SLIDE Jeff Hanson and Elton John

Jeff's vision was to give away \$1 million by the time he was 20 years old and he actually gave away 1.2 million. Jeff is a member of one of our United Methodist churches and his parents never would've guessed when he was six years old he was going to be a painter. They could've never pictured this amazing story featured in People Magazine and on CNN but God used their disappointment as a springboard to do something even greater.

Are you getting the idea?

SLIDE **Mission**
Vision
Plan

What's your mission? What's your vision? What's your plan?

This month we've been talking about success and we have been talking about it in terms of our resources and how we have been blessed. At least once a year I think it's important for each one of us to stop and ask ourselves what's really important in life. We ask you to think about tithing and giving and what really matters in your life.

One of the most popular groups right now in radio is a group of young people in their 20s called *.fun*. One of their songs has a refrain which is haunting and brutally honest. What they singing the refrain over and over again is this, "***O Lord, I'm still not sure what I stand for. What do I stand for? Most nights, I don't know.***"

I want to ask you a question. Do you know what you stand for? Because what you do with your resources and your gifts and your finances are a way of expressing what you stand for. For me, I make a commitment to tithe because it is the statement of my faith and it keeps me focused on what's really important in life.

When you look at this young man Jeff Hanson you know what he stands for. I had a mentor once who told me, "Jeff, I can look your checkbook and tell you what you stand for in life." That's why every year I take some time to talk to you about what you give and how you give. So many of you are faithful in your giving and you are generous and you make a difference in the world because of that and my hope is that it will lead you towards your purpose and your vision in life.

I want to end today's sermon with the Scripture that is profound when it comes to discovering our purpose and seeing a vision and putting in place a plan. Paul writes to Timothy these words.

SLIDE **17 Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. 18 Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share**

with others. 19 By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.

By first-century standards all of us in this room would be considered rich. Each week when we make a commitment to put God first and to trust in God instead of our resources, we live out our purpose. Part of making a plan that leads into your vision and your purpose is being willing to give. During this sermon series we've talked about success and success is about having a purpose, painting a picture of what it means to live out that purpose and then making a plan. My hope is that you will live out that plan in the days ahead.

SLIDE Prayer

I invite you to whisper to God under your breath this prayer.

Thank you oh God for loving me. I accept your love. Help me to love you with all that I am and all that I have. Help me to faithfully serve you with my life. Help me to love and care for your people. Help me to care for your creation. All that I am and all that I have I give to you, with praise and gratitude. May my commitments be a sign of my commitment to you. In Jesus name, Amen.

“What is Your MVP?”

Theme: Success

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

Meditation Moments for Monday, November 11 – Read Proverbs 19:20-23 – The quest for “wisdom” gripped the Hebrew sages who wrote and collected these proverbs. Central to the wisdom they saw in action in human lives was the reality that God’s purpose, not just human wishes, must define a person’s life.

- “Many plans are in a person’s mind, but the Lord’s purpose will succeed.” What would you identify as the two or three biggest plans in your mind right now? In what ways are you seeking to discern whether those plans are in accord with “the Lord’s purpose”? What resources do you trust most in helping you to understand the Lord’s purpose?
- “Listen to advice and accept instruction, so you might grow wise in the future.” Do you believe those who know you best would say that you have a heart that is willing to listen to advice and accept instruction? If that’s a struggle, how can you grow in your capacity to listen and learn so you will become wiser?

Prayer: *O God, teach me how your purposes for me and for the world you love can shape and energize my life. Grow in me a willingness to listen to you and to accept your instruction. Amen.*

Tuesday, November 12 – Read Luke 8:4-8, 11-15 – In this parable, Jesus metaphorically described various states of the human heart (soil), and how each one affects our ability to listen to and accept God’s word (seed). Living within God’s purpose means cultivating an open, “good soil,” heart. When we do that, “concerns, riches, and pleasures of life” won’t be able to crowd out the good fruit God is at work to bear in us.

- Who or what first planted “the seed” of God’s Word in the soil of your life? In what ways did your decision to live life as a Christ-follower affect and re-shape your sense of who you are and your life’s purpose? Which of the four types of soil in Jesus’ parable best describes how the seed is growing in your life right now?
- What’s most important in your life? What are some concerns or interests that have taken on a less prominent place in your life as you’ve reordered your priorities, putting God at the top? What key choices have helped to open you to God’s work in helping you to cultivate “good soil” for God’s Word to grow in?

Prayer: *Lord God, the fruit you bear in my life is wonderful, and I want to be good soil for it. Give me clear vision as to what gets in the way of letting that fruit grow. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 13 – Read Matthew 6:19-24 – Jesus focused on the biggest choice all of us are called to make in life—the choice of our ultimate, governing loyalty. Wealth in and of itself is value neutral, but Jesus said that making it the center of life is not. He taught that “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” and added, “You cannot serve God and wealth.”

- Pastor Rick Warren wrote, “If I put my money in my house that is where my heart is. If I put my money in eating out, if I put my money in my clothes, if I put my money into a hobby, that’s where my heart is. So the question becomes, where do you want your heart to be?” How do you answer this question?
- Scholar Craig Keener wrote that “Mammon” (the word translated “wealth” or “money” in verse 24) was “an Aramaic word for possessions or money, and Jesus seems to be personifying it as an idol.” Since few of us would ever consider physically bowing down before our checkbook or a prized possession, what do you think “serving” wealth would look like today? What does it mean, tangibly, for you to choose to serve God?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you are Lord of my life, and I want to “collect treasures” in heaven. As I make concrete, everyday choices of how to spend my time, energy and money, increase my capacity to live out your values. Amen.*

Thursday, November 14 – Read Matthew 6:25-34 – Jesus promised that if we make it our highest purpose and priority to “desire first and foremost God’s kingdom,” then God will work with us to attend to the other needs we face—and to distinguish “needs” from “wants.”

- Jesus seemed to anticipate modern research when he said, “Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?” In fact, we have lots of research showing that worry shortens our lives. How can you distinguish needs from wants, and plan for the future without worrying about it?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you modeled a life of peace and trust, in which my energy can focus on your purposes rather than my fears. Help me to keep learning how to “do” that kind of life with you. Amen.*

Friday, November 15 – Read 1 Timothy 6:5-11, 17-19 – The apostle Paul had obviously known people who’d lost faith and caused themselves “a lot of pain” by loving money too much.

- Pastor Gary Demarest wrote hard-hitting comments about these verses: “We are bombarded constantly with the message that financial independence is the great goal of the good life ... Consumerism is an infectious lifestyle, and most of us American Christians are more deeply infected than we realize or admit.” Then he asked these thought-provoking questions: “If we can and do achieve the kind of financial security and independence so highly touted, at what real points in life do we have to trust God? Is our trust in God limited only to “spiritual” things, or is God the Lord of all of life? Does God really promise to provide for our necessities? What are necessities? At what point do we cease expanding our ‘needs’ list? How much is enough?”

Prayer: *Lord God, I want to take hold of what is truly life. Help me to make righteousness, holy living, faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness my driving purposes, as they are yours. Amen.*

Saturday, November 16 – Read 2 Timothy 2:1-10 – The upbeat, joyous tone of these verses stood out against the setting in which Paul wrote them. He was Rome’s prisoner (verse 9), probably chained at all times to a guard’s arm, yet he wrote about “strength,” “good news,” and “eternal glory.” Paul’s purpose had never been comfort, safety or social status. He lived to serve God, to share God’s word—a word no one could lock up! So no one could lock up Paul’s spirit, either. As scholar William Barclay wrote, “Paul was quite certain that the Roman government could never find a prison which could contain the word of God. It is one of the facts of history that if human effort could have wiped out Christianity, it would have perished long ago; but men cannot kill that which is immortal.”

- Paul expressed the core of his and Timothy’s life purpose in one powerful phrase: “Remember Jesus Christ” (verse 8). Do a quick inventory of your thinking over the last 24 hours. How often have you remembered Jesus Christ? Jesus offers you a life of soaring freedom and purpose. What will you do to make the coming holidays a time of remembering Jesus Christ, and living in the freedom and purpose he offers you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, I want you to be my life’s center, focus and purpose. As I choose you daily, set me free to live life your way. Amen.*

Family Activity: Do you appreciate receiving a blessing? Blessings, whether they are words, gifts or kind deeds, uplift our spirits, renew our strength and sustain us along life’s journey. Scripture is filled with blessings from God. Read aloud these passages: Genesis 2:2-3; Psalm 33:12; Ezekiel 34:26; and Matthew 5:3-11. Discuss the blessings found in each one. Create a family blessing basket. Write kind words or phrases on small slips of colorful paper and place them in a basket. Younger children can draw pictures to place in the blessing basket. Whenever a family member, friend or neighbor needs a blessing, pull a slip of paper, read or show it to him or her, then share a hug, smile or (if appropriate) a prayer.